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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 TEL AVIV 001105

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SUBJECT: H5N1 CONFIRMED IN ISRAEL POULTRY DEATHS; ONE
MILLION BIRDS TO BE CULLED

REF: TEL AVIV 1087

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE HANDLE ACCORDINGLY.

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Summary: On March 19, the Kimron Veterinary Institute Laboratory at Bet Dagan confirmed the presence of the H5N1 strain of avian influenza in turkey flocks from the kibbutzim at Ein Hasheloshah and Holit, and at Sede Moshe and Nahshom. The outbreak has not spread beyond these areas (identified previously in reftel). There are no confirmed human cases of H5N1. Seven poultry workers from the affected region in the Negev, previously hospitalized for testing and observation, were discharged over the weekend, after their serology was found to be negative for the presence of the H5N1 antigens. The MOA is taking steps to prevent the spread of the disease through the culling of approximately one million birds in the three-kilometer radius of the affected turkey farms. Assessment of the economic impact of the outbreak is just beginning. The Cabinet met March 19 to discuss a compensation package for affected poultry farmers. Cooperative efforts between MOA and Israeli Veterinary Services officials, and Veterinary Service in Gaza and West Bank PA MOA officials are underway. Meetings were scheduled for today at the Erez crossing and on March 21 in Beit-Il near Ramallah to discuss coordination of epidemiological efforts, disease control and possible technical assistance. The GOI has announced that there is no significant public health risk. End Summary

H5N1 CONFIRMED IN FOWL, NO CASES CONFIRMED IN HUMANS

2. (SBU) There are no confirmed human cases of H5N1 avian influenza. Seven poultry workers from the affected region in the Negev, who were hospitalized for testing and observation, were discharged over the weekend, after their serology was found to be negative for the presence of the H5N1 antigens.

3. (U) According to the Director of the Ministry of Health's Emergency and Disaster Management Division Dr. Laor Daniel, the MOH is administering Tamiflu as a prophylactic treatment to approximately sixty individuals, comprised primarily of poultry workers and MOA/MOD culling team members, who may have come in contact with infected birds. As a surveillance and monitoring measure, the MOH has sent blood samples from several dozen of poultry workers from the affected farms for laboratory testing.

4. (SBU) Both PCR testing and pathogen isolation by egg inoculation conducted at Kimron Veterinary Institute have confirmed the presence of the H5N1 in tissue samples from dead birds sent from each of the affected turkey farms. What is unknown at this time is the source of the outbreak of the H5N1 avian influenza outbreak. MOA Director of Veterinary Services Dr. Moshe Haimovich told econoff that one possible theory of vector transmission is that cages used to transport fowl from one or more of the outbreak sites to the slaughtering facility were not properly disinfected before reusing the cages to transport fowl from other sites.

ONE MILLION BIRDS EXPECTED TO BE CULLED

5. (U) On March 18 and 19, Ministry of Agriculture teams supervised the initial culling of birds at the affected turkey farms located at Ein Hasheloshah and Holit kibbutzim, and at Moshav Sde Moshe, and within a three-kilometer radius. Approximately 10,200 turkeys were destroyed at Ein Hasheloshah, 21,000 turkeys at Holit, and 6,000 turkeys at Sede Moshe. On March 20, culling of fowl within a three-kilometer radius continued at Kibbutz Sufa near Holit and at the Kissufim and Nirim kibbutzim near Ein Hasheloshah. MOA teams, aided by Defense Ministry contractors, plan to begin culling 19,500 turkeys at the affected farm located at Nahshom on March 21. Fowl will also be culled within a

three-kilometer radius at Kibbutz Harel, and the Tekoa and Tzalfon moshavim. The MOA expects the completion of the culling of approximately one million fowl by the end of the week.

16. (SBU) The Ministry of Agriculture anticipates the arrival of a shipment of four million doses of avian influenza vaccine for poultry from the Netherlands within the next day or so. No decision has been made at this time as to whether the vaccine will be used. The vaccine would be used if the measures undertaken in the affected areas prove to be ineffective. Dr. Hamovich expressed to econoff March 19 that Ministry of Agriculture is cautiously optimistic that they have contained the outbreak in the four quarantined areas.

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ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT OF SITUATION JUST BEGINNING
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17. (U) The impact on the poultry industry in Israel was felt immediately following the announcement of the avian influenza outbreak in the press on March 17 when the European Commission announced that it was placing a temporary ban on the import of poultry products from Israel following the preliminary confirmation of the H5N1 strain at four turkey farms. According to a report in the Jerusalem Post, the EU will convene this week to review the ban.

18. (U) Consumer demand for poultry products has decreased, despite public safety assurances made by the MOH and MOA. In particular, sales dropped in outdoor markets. Stall owners in Tel Aviv's Carmel outdoor market reported a fifty percent drop in poultry sales on Friday.

19. (SBU) The Israel Farmers Organization is already lobbying the GOI for full compensation to poultry farmers who have lost livestock in the affected areas. Poultry farmers are entitled to a pro-rated compensation package to offset their financial losses under a GOI statute pertaining to the destruction of poultry ordered by a governmental entity to prevent a disease outbreak. Under this statute, the GOI would reimburse farmers for approximately seventy percent of direct costs they incurred. Compensation is also based on the market age of the flock. Typically, turkey farmers earn 55 shekels for each female bird and 110 shekels for each male bird that they sell. In anticipation of a potential avian influenza outbreak, the MOA updated the Compensation Tables two months ago which will assist poultry farmers in receiving a realistic market price for the poultry they lost. A preliminary estimate of the compensation package a farmer would receive for a flock of 200,000 birds is one to seven million NIS. This amount does not include the expenses required to restart production.

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MOA REACHES OUT TO PALESTINIAN VETERINARY SERVICE
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10. (SBU) According to the MOA, cooperative efforts between Israeli Veterinary Services officials and PA Veterinary Service officials in Gaza and West Bank are underway. A meeting took place today at the Erez crossing; another is scheduled for March 21 in Beit-Il near Ramallah to discuss coordination of epidemiological efforts, disease control and possible technical assistance.

11. (SBU) Dr. Haimovich told econoff that instructional DVDs on preventing the spread of avian influenza were sent to the IDF Office at Erez on March 19 for distribution to the Veterinary Service in Gaza.

12. (SBU) One item which is still pending is a decision from the MOH on Dr. Hamovich's request to provide personal protective equipment (PPEs) to Palestinians. Dr. Laor Daniel, Director of the MOH Emergency and Disaster Management Division told ESTH Officer March 20 that the MOH was waiting for a formal request from the Palestinian MOH.